

# PHAST Success Story: Partners Sharing Data to Address Overdose Prevention Gaps in Camden, New Jersey

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## Background

From July 2022 to June 2023, the CDC Foundation funded three different communities around the country to support implementation of the Public Health and Safety Teams (PHAST) framework. One awardee was the Camden County Department of Health & Human Services in New Jersey.

Camden County is an urban community of 71,000 people located in southern New Jersey, along the Pennsylvania border. Like many communities across the United States, Camden County has seen a steady increase in overdose deaths over the past two decades. In recent years, the county health department observed a spike in fatalities, which spurred partners to seek a national evidence-based model to better understand and reduce overdose fatalities.

## Bringing Partners Together

To address the crisis, community leaders began their efforts by establishing the Addiction Awareness Taskforce in 2014. Incorporating the PHAST framework within their existing taskforce offered an opportunity to assess the county's existing resources and use a data-driven approach to determine the effectiveness of their work. The team sought to understand if their interventions were effective and how they could be enhanced. "That's where PHAST has been really beneficial to us ... the first thing we did was take an inventory," stated the Project Lead for Camden County Department of Health & Human Services. With a list of existing county- and community-wide overdose prevention initiatives, the team was able to identify local strengths, needs and opportunities for greater collaboration.

The PHAST framework provided the catalyst for strengthening relationships with different sectors, such as law enforcement and health care, to identify shared priorities. "[PHAST] brought a deeper level of shared understanding among sectors, creating tighter unity and a forum to share new ideas, like how to implement training on naloxone and overdose reversal," shared the Project Lead.

Camden PHAST members were able to meet with their county's District Attorney, Medical Examiner's Office and local Federal Bureau of Investigations office to discuss emerging drug

trends in the community. The PHAST launched a process to regularly share pertinent data and information with the [Overdose Fatality Review](#) (OFR) team, mental health administrators and drug and alcohol task forces from across the state.

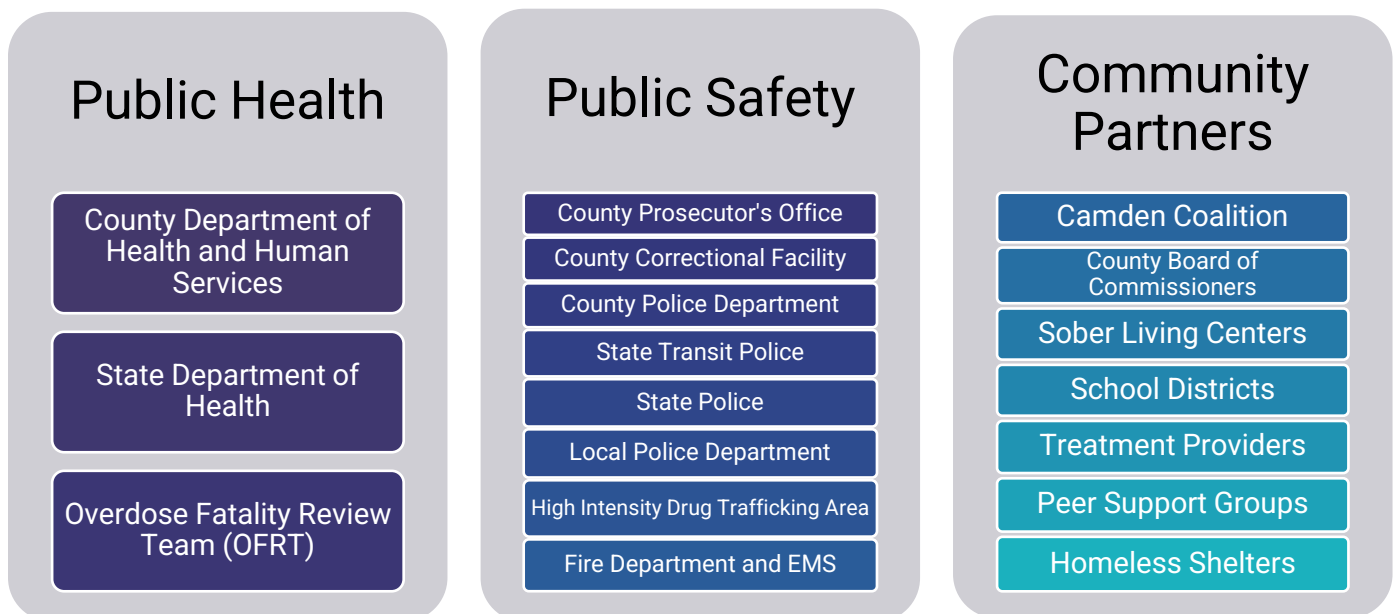
In 2022, as overdose-related deaths continued to increase, PHAST members used OFR data to identify patterns of fatalities occurring near hotels and motels over a five-year period. Based on this data, PHAST members focused their efforts on working with these sites to distribute naloxone and to provide naloxone training for their staff. The team also launched a peer-driven pilot project in which a certified peer recovery specialist would follow up with individuals who had recently overdosed to connect them to needed resources and services in the community.

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## Centering Peer Leaders

PHAST team members represent over 20 different agencies and individuals with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, including people who use drugs. Members meet quarterly to share updates and to review and discuss data, address knowledge gaps and collectively identify opportunities to strengthen existing interventions.

PHAST helps build partnerships with key players in the fight against overdoses. “A young child died on a school bus due to fentanyl overdose, which hit the community hard,” said the Project Lead. “Because of our strong partnerships with school superintendents, we were able to put naloxone in over two hundred schools in Camden County. We also created a free naloxone training course for teachers, parents and students. This rapid mobilization of prevention efforts would not have been possible before PHAST.”



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## Strategies Catalyzing Success

The PHAST team points to specific approaches that led to their success.

- **Look at the data to see who is being impacted by the overdose epidemic.** The collaboration with Camden Coalition through the PHAST provided the County access to regional Health Information Exchange (HIE) data and analytical expertise to leverage data and generate insights to inform decision-making. This enabled the PHAST to identify patterns of overdose occurring in hotels and motels and detect possible racial differences in overdose fatalities among men in the region. In addition, it presented the PHAST with the opportunity to explore the potential of creating a comprehensive dataset to better understand and address the needs of people in the community.
- **Respond to the needs of your community.** It's important to be familiar with your jurisdiction and the populations that you plan to reach through overdose prevention services. Ask, "what is it that our residents need or what are they looking for?" It is critical to identify and incorporate the community's assets to best tailor programs to address unmet needs. For example, to learn more about the specific needs of people experiencing homelessness, the Project Lead attended sub-committee meetings focused on this population. Findings were shared with both the PHAST and OFR team.
- **Be strategic with partnerships.** The Project Lead advises teams to go deep and wide in terms of the variety of partners at the table. "Talk to different folks in different sectors and different types of organizations." And "get key sectors involved, because they are the folks that collectively can help to make the change." It's critical to get leadership buy-in from all partner organizations. "Make it your goal to [reach leadership] where you can advocate for policy change to achieve positive outcomes in your community." Only through strong and collaborative partnerships can data effectively used to drive meaningful action.

## Conclusion

Since the creation of PHAST, Camden County has expanded the number and diversity of their partners to implement many programs to support people who use drugs and prevent overdoses. They launched their certified peer recovery pilot project, placed "Naloxboxes" in over 200 schools, 30 social settings, and 20 county buildings and conducted overdose prevention programs within Camden County schools. In April 2023, they implemented a new mobile buprenorphine pilot, developed a wrap-around program at an area hospital, created a fentanyl awareness and stigma campaign, and began to expand naloxone distribution within hospitals.

Alongside these initiatives, the PHAST is developing a robust and comprehensive reporting system to track their interventions and ensure they continue to be effective and equitable. Together, these efforts aim to create a sustainable and equitable overdose prevention approach to improving health outcomes for all residents of Camden County.